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Preface xxiii

123 People in general are often insecure about their particular varieties
of speech, and collecting spontaneous speech data can be a problem for
anyone conducting a linguistic survey. It is even more of a problem on
[193] the Sea Islands because the native speakers of Gullah can and do adjust
their speech to produce the closest possible approximations of standard
English when they are addressing strangers. To eliminate pressure on the
speakers to avoid the creole speech (and to help validate my presence), I
explained that one of my objectives for being on the islands was to learn
as much as possible about folk medicine "roots," folktales, "lies," and
"the old-time talk." I explained, for example, that my grandmother had
taught me to identify and collect herbs or roots which were helpful in
alleviating certain ailments or even in effecting certain cures. These
topics generated much interest and humor; consequently, I was able to
assemble a wide store of knowledge concerning medicinal cures, com-
plete with folktales, as well as to collect several varieties of speech data.

123 Something I learned by sitting through one market day in Charleston
• 437 illustrates a final point. As I observed an islander selling tomatoes, I
realized that she felt much more satisfaction when she sold her goods to
a person with whom she had haggled assiduously over the price than
when she sold the same amount for a higher price to a well-intentioned
but clearly patronizing customer. She had been robbed of the satisfac-
tion of arriving at an "agreed" price. Feelings about the inequality of
human beings had been transmitted along with the unequal prices of the
tomatoes.

123 Achieving and maintaining equality in relationships is crucial when
124 striving to establish rapport with informants. Kenneth Goldstein cites a
statement to this effect made by Alan Lomax in 1950 during a sym-
posium on data collecting at the Mid-century International Folklore
Conference held at Indiana University:

People say to me that they would like to help me along with my
work, that I look as if I need help. And I tell them that I am taking
up their time and that I would like to make it up to them. There was
never any question of dignity being involved; none of us in our
situation was more dignified than anyone else. If the informant
liked to drink, I drank, and if he liked to acquire a salary, I haggled
with him very hard and very seriously, but we fought over it as
equals.⁶

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rials—pine needles, bulrushes, sweet grass, and palmetto leaves—for the girls and women to weave. The children learn to make baskets at around six years of age, and by the time they are in their teens, each has mastered a certain style and design that generally carries his or her trademark in the weave. Most of the baskets follow a simple coiling technique with a knot used as a base. The free ends of the sweet grass bundle are folded and then wound around the knot to begin a coil. Then an opening is pierced in the center knot and a strip of palm leaf is pulled through the opening, wrapped around the grass coil, and pulled back through a second opening made in the knot to anchor or station the coil. As this process is repeated, the coil begins to circle out from the center knot to create a basket base that is circular or oval. From this base, the basket is constructed by changing the angle at which one circular row is fastened to another. The palm stitch in the Mt. Pleasant baskets does not interlock with the stitches in previous rows of the coil. Consequently, the stitches appear to radiate out from the center knot in a linear way, much like the spokes of a wheel.⁴¹

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The baskets, like the islanders' other crafts, are displayed along U.S. Highway 17, north of Charleston, or sold in the open markets near downtown Charleston where tourists crowd in daily to haggle over the prices of vegetables, hand-woven clothing, jewelry, and other wares, including items of brass, silver, and gold. Everything has a bargain price, and the basket sellers, like the other marketeers, are professionals in the art of bargaining. Baskets are priced according to size and difficulty of design, and it is a bad reflection on one's selling skills to be pressured into parting with a basket at a price lower than that established by the community; such an act may bring censure from one's family and from members of the community. The basket weavers, although seemingly unsophisticated and some of them certainly poor, are quite shrewd bargainers. I watched an exchange that took place when a very impressive car stopped in front of a basket stand along Highway 17. The driver, smoking a large cigar and accompanied by three elegantly dressed women, strolled over to look at the baskets. He picked up a tray of coasters and asked the basket weaver how much she would charge him to make coasters with specific dimensions for his beer cans. She hesitated, looked down at the basket that she was weaving, and said, "About twenty dollars." He then asked how long it would take for her to make them. She replied with some reservation that it would take her at least a week. He quickly took a

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• 439 twenty-dollar bill from his wallet, tore it in half, gave her half of it, and told her he would give her the other half when she finished weaving the coasters. He left thinking that he had indeed made a bargain. Feeling somewhat dismayed by the whole procedure, I asked her how she could afford to make the coasters for only twenty dollars if it took her a week to weave them. She smiled slyly and said she could make them in a matter of hours.

Social Structure

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156 The ways of the Sea Islanders, as I have said, offer valuable insights into an Afro-American culture which has had relatively little contact with the customs of the white majority until very recent years. According to one group of researchers, the unusual circumstances which created the culture also "created a unique psyche for Blacks in the Sea Island area":

We have seen their consequences in a number of ways in our research. We constantly encounter elderly Blacks whose knowledge of and acquaintance with whites is very limited. They have not had to interact with whites or the majority culture in the same way as Blacks in the other parts of this country. Many of them have a fierce kind of pride and a lack of fear which is seldom seen in other places. The self-doubt and sense of inadequacy and inferiority often cited as characteristic of the Black psyche are not found to the same degrees in our Sea Island research.⁴²

596 Their preserved traditions, too, set the Sea Islanders apart from other Americans, black or white. The extended family is the norm in the Sea Islands. Most islands are sectioned off into family communities, where all members of one family, their close relatives, and people remotely related live or have a right to live as long as they can satisfactorily show evidence of kinship. Land is not normally sold to family members but is passed on through an unwritten contract called "heir's land"; if land is sold to relatives, the charge is only one dollar to fulfill "legal tenets of the state."⁴³

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(423) Land ownership is closely aligned with kinship, and kinship is the primary social factor necessary for acceptance into island communities. One must be born, reared, and have a known family history on a